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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: IRAQI GOVERNMENT, CONSTITUTION, FEDERALISM, SOVEREIGNTY, FOREIGN RELATIONS; BAGHDAD

SUMMARY: Discussion on the Constitution, Iraqi Sovereignty, Federalism, and Foreign Relations were the major editorial themes of the daily newspapers on September 27, 2005. END SUMMARY.

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SELECTED COMMENTARIES

[1](#)A. "On the Brink of the Referendum"
(Al-Bayyan, affiliated with Islamic Ad-Dawa party led by Ibrahim Al-Ja'afari, published this front-page unattributed editorial)

"The referendum will be held within the few next weeks and we have to make use of the interim time by increasing interaction with people through conferences and forums in all provinces to ensure adequate education about this process. It is very important to educate people about the referendum so that they understand the basis for rejecting or approving the constitution. Religious authorities have endorsed the current draft constitution and this will encourage the passage of this draft. At the same time, many political groups across the spectrum have supported it. But, the most important facet is citizen awareness about the importance of this document. I think National Assembly members, and in particular Constitutional Committee Members, must be responsible for this mission.

"They know how the constitution was drafted and for this reason they must make use of the short time left to hold meetings with people and explain to them why they should vote "Yes" to the constitution. There are a few groups (working behind the scenes) trying to exploit media outlets to obfuscate the constitutional process. In fact, we do not oppose those groups because they have right to freely express their opinions about the constitution. However, they should not turn people against the constitution by using futile excuses and insufficient proof as a way to convince some groups that the current constitution does not satisfy their ambitions. It is immoral to use deception and accusations to obscure the truth so that they can achieve two-thirds of the votes required to reject the constitution.

"We just want to know why those groups want to thwart the constitutional process. The constitution is important because it is a document that has the consensus of a whole spectrum of Iraq's people. Any delay in the referendum will take the country backwards and this will not benefit anyone in Iraq. Any interruption in this process will prolong the coalition forces' presence in Iraq. For all these reasons, we have to work hard and seize the opportunity today to take the most important step in Iraq's history."

[1](#)B. "Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Iraq"
(Asharq Al-Awsat, independent, London-based, Saudi-owned, published this page-nine editorial by Abdul Rahman Al-Rashed)

"Usually, the Saudi Foreign Minister is not so easily angered but he couldn't tolerate the imbalance of Iran's infiltration in the south of Iraq. This infiltration threatens the whole region and may ignite a war that lasts for twenty years. In fact, the Iranians are interfering in Iraq because there has been no Arab presence in Iraq since the downfall of Saddam's regime. Saudi Arabia and Egypt have avoided establishing representation in Iraq as long as the Americans are here. As a result, Iran has intervened in Iraqi affairs to affect Iraq's religious establishment and due to the importance of Iraq's oil wealth. Iran's sudden affection for Iraq was also facilitated by disengagement

from the Gulf States and Egypt's dismissal of interests in Iraq.

"Unfortunately, most Arabs who are interested in Iraqi affairs are busy speaking about the occupation. They haven't taken into consideration the fact that American forces will leave at some point during the next three years. This neglect will automatically lead to Iranian dominance in Iraq because it is the most powerful country in the region. Moreover, the extended presence of the U.S. in Iraq will lead radical Shiite groups to clash with the Americans, in addition to the Sunni extremist groups that are presently fighting them. I think that Iran is making a big mistake by attempting to control important parts of Iraq or to call for separation or the federal division of the country. In the end, this will lead to new wars.

"But, we must distinguish between radical Sunni calls that reject federalism and the positive call for federal experiments in Iraq; the federal system is not as bad as Sunni extremists claim. It is impractical to link all of Iraq's affairs with Baghdad because this policy is contrary to international standards that aim to reduce bureaucracies and engage regions. On the other hand, federalism means that Iraq is divided into 18 provinces that all meet together in the parliament—a model of which happened during the last elections.

"Federalism allows Iraqi territories to enjoy their own interests without any concerns of separation and it gives the majority the most votes inside the parliament while at the same time not marginalizing the rights of minorities. [Despite that] the proposed system of federalism in the Iraqi constitution represents a dangerous division for the country that will divide Iraq into small countries that will fight with each other for years. Iraq's new crisis requires that none of Iraq's neighbors foment radical Shiite or Sunni elements within the country. In addition, they must not be involved in the battle of statements that often lead to disastrous policies."

1C. "The Constitution . Gateway to Rule of Law"
(Al-Ittihad - affiliated with PUK, pro-coalition, published this page-three editorial by Abdul Hadi Mahdi)

"All concerned political parties, and other Iraqi movements including those who oppose the draft constitution, are preparing for the coming referendum process. On both sides, this is the significant feature of a new democratic and free Iraq--depending on what their reasons are, all sides express their own points of view peacefully and freely.

"This is an internal Iraqi affair, foreigners from outside Iraq have no right to interfere or to express their own opinions about the draft constitution or to claim that they are representing a certain Iraqi group. Actually, we have passed the most critical and decisive stage--drafting the Iraqi constitution and we have overcome complicated challenges facing our great Iraq. Iraqi sects: Kurds, Arabs, Shi'a and Sunni are united to face challenges from those who want to harm Iraq.

"Recently, several statements have been released declaring that there is a fear that Iraq might be divided and we wonder if the timing for such statements was a coincidence; released in a decisive moment in Iraqi's lives when we are preparing for the coming referendum. All those claiming the right to express their fears for Iraq have been silent for two years now watching Iraqis paying with their blood as a price for determining their democratic future. Iraqis are ready to decide their future by saying yes to the constitution in the coming referendum and then they will open closed doors to a prosperous future in a state replete with laws and institutions.

"Accepting or rejecting the constitution is not the end of the road for Iraqis, we can amend disputed articles in the constitution and we can have dialogue with the opposition. Still, all Iraqi efforts to change the constitution for the better will be a decisive decision. As our president Talabani said, 'Only the holy Qur'an cannot be changed but we can change all other things.' It is our permanent constitution but we can always change its articles for the better and it is better to have this national compact than to have nothing to define our Iraqi future. In the upcoming referendum Iraqis will decide their future."

1D. "As Far As Alternatives Go."
(Az-Zaman, independent, anti-coalition published this back-page column by Fateh Abdul Salam)

"Iraqis have the right to know what is going on in Iraq. A few days ago President Bush said that he expects the worst with regard to the security situation (could it be worse?); British Prime Minister Tony Blair said he never expected violence to reach its current level; and France (a country not involved in the war) said it intends to host an

international conference to save Iraq from impending division.

"I do not want to get into the causes of these catastrophic results-they begin and end with the blind occupation, but I do want to ask about the alternatives available to Washington and question whether political achievements are possible in a country where America can do anything militarily.

"Many Iraqi politicians continue to turn a blind eye to the realities of this third year of the new era, realities which differ from those three years ago. There is a whole new power structure in Iraq, with an additional center of power in the Green Zone. Crises have been created and proposals have failed to bring complete and final solutions. The U.S. presence will not lead Iraq to stability, nor will its withdrawal guarantee the country will survive the influence of neighboring powers. Do those individuals who deliver statements on television sense the seriousness of the situation in Iraq?

"Iraq is in a very critical situation, and available options are complex, despite attempts to simplify them."

E. "The Constitution and Federalism"

(Al-Dawa newspaper, no bias, affiliated with the Al-Dawa movement, published this page-seven editorial by Hussein Al-Jabiry)

"People around the world are competing to build and help their countries prosper, but when Iraqis decided to hold an election in order to form a Transitional National Assembly and government, an Iraqi group objected to holding elections justifying their stance by claiming difficult security conditions. The elections happened with wide participation in spite of the bad security situation and threats which were widely disseminated by the media and even some ministers within the former government. Elections succeeded, every one witnessed that success including the United Nations but objectors questioned the legitimacy of the elections and justified that by saying: 'it doesn't represent all Iraqi sects.'

"Iraq succeeded in the draft constitution process and formed a committee comprised of all sects, even those who didn't participate in the elections-but those who objected to the elections opposed certain items which the majority of the committee agreed upon. The objectors opposed the article referring to Iraq's Arab identity, in spite of the fact that many Arab constitutions lack this and Iraq is a country of multiple ethnicities. They objected to federalism and justified it by saying it would divide Iraq even though federalism unites the country, preserves its natural resources and puts the Ministries of Defense and Foreign Affairs under the umbrella of the central government.

"The aim of the objectors is clear: they object to any endeavor that others have to rebuild the new Iraq. This situation reminds us of a popular tale: One day an Iraqi man married a foreign woman who was opposed to the relatives within his household. When they asked for certain kinds of food, she cooked food they couldn't stand until they discovered a solution-they asked her to cook food they didn't like and their goal was accomplished."

F. "Silent Regimes and Passive Watchers"

(Al-Adala, no bias, affiliated with SCIRI led by Abdul Aziz Al-Hakim, published this last-page column by Hamza Shamkhy)

"Regimes are silent and people are passively watching the terrorism and destruction that is happening daily in Iraq. Unfortunately, the entire world pays no attention, just to those who raise empty slogans (of Jihad), liberating Iraq from the occupation, and demanding the Iraqi people fight (the occupation) even if this fight results in the Iraqi people destroying their country.

"But at the same time we find the Palestinians, the Golan Heights, and the Shebaa Farms representing land under occupation--there are many military and security bases and foreigners occupying their land, so why don't they liberate their land first and attack these bases instead of coming to Iraq? Actually, Iraqi people comprehend their own issues, and no one has the right to turn our home into a place for terrorism, crime and corruption.

"They were supposed to lend assistance and support to Iraq, to help it in its time of need, but unfortunately they prefer silence and to passively watch Iraqis who are facing terrorism, chaos, crime and destruction. In spite of that we hear them rant and label the terrorism against Iraqis as 'resistance to the occupation' and failing to (respectfully) label our dead as 'martyrs.' We hear their sounds that advocate different kinds of terrorism, but we find their silence when it comes to Iraqi blood that is shed daily.

What kind of a puzzle is this? What kind of world is this?
The only thing that we can say is: silent regimes and
passive watchers."

KHALILZAD